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ABSTRACT

Historical causes of rural poverty and general recommendations for work among rural youth in India, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are presented in this summary of national reports given before the Rural Youth Study Group in 1976. In addition to study papers on each country, the volume contains an introduction on rural youth and the rural predicament which summarizes the countries' common history, foreign influences, governmental and church-related rural development projects, rural poverty, and five essential systematic phases of rural development. Each national study paper contains a map, historical summary, and basic geographic, political, and socioeconomic data. Subtopics are as follows: India--Indian independence movement, peasant movements, youth student movements; Malaysia--racial problem, rural economy, rural youth in West Malaysia, church role in rural development; Philippines--general background, land ownership, rural struggle, survey of village youth organization, local churches; Sri Lanka--political-economic structures of rural society, caste system and religion, role of youth in rural struggle, survey of rural youth development programs; Thailand--community solidarity, role of religion, economic problems of villagers, role of youth/students in rural struggle. A concluding paper treats the role of youth in the national struggle (training, motivating church youth). (RS)

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RURAL YOUTH IN ASIA

Report of the CCA Rural Youth Study Group

Sibu, Malaysia 1976

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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CONTENTS

1 ● Foreword

5 ● The Rural Predicament in Asia: Analysis & Guidelines for Action – A Summary of National Reports

11 ● India

19 ● Malaysia

25 ● Philippines

33 ● Sri Lanka

39 ● Thailand

Appendices:

45 ● Youth in the National Struggle An Introduction to National Presentations

49 ● List of Participants

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FOREWORD

This volume brings together five study papers on rural youth and the rural predicament drawn or condensed from national reports presented in the Rural Youth Study Group, held on March 14-19, 1976 in Sibu, Malaysia. The Study Group was organized by the CCA Rural Youth Committee as part of its continuing effort to provide opportunities for regional sharing of experiences, skills, and resources among young people engaged in rural development. It was primarily an occasion for participants to:

1. Gain a more systematic understanding of the rural predicament in five Asian countries: India, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Philippines; and,

2. In the light of this understanding, sharpen regional and national strategies for concrete action.

Because of the diversity in style and length of the national reports, we have not reproduced them in their original form. On the whole however the national reports have tried to deal with the historical causes of rural poverty and have offered general recommendations for work among rural youth.

It was not the main intention of the participants to add to the proliferation of surveys already conducted by various service agencies and research outfits. Neither was it their objective to share study materials for academic discussions. Study surveys were conducted primarily for the purpose of action, learning, and teaching among grassroot groups. Hence these studies constituted the initial phase of action-oriented programmes involving rural youth and were essentially a learning experience for potential rural youth fieldworkers.

Carmencita Karagdag
Secretary for Youth
Christian Conference of Asia

THE RURAL PREDICAMENT IN ASIA
Analysis & Guidelines for Action

A SUMMARY OF NATIONAL REPORTS

This paper picks up the common points that emerged during the discussion of the national papers. It gives a historical perspective of the rural predicament in Asia and offers some general guidelines for action.

Despite the diversity of the national presentations, it became evident that the five countries under review are heirs to a common historical heritage and a shared present. At the same time however there are real differences arising out of particular national and international factors influencing developments in each country.

Before the onset of western colonization, village life in Asia was relatively secure and well-ordered. This is not to say that there were no serious problems. At times rural populations were decimated during famines and dynastic wars, and the subsistence economy was not exactly to everybody's satisfaction. In larger and better organized agrarian and maritime states, fairly regular exactions were levied on the produce of the village in the form of tributes and peasant services for road-building, religious monuments, etc. Nonetheless most villages enjoyed a self-reliant, self-sustaining economy, characterized by fairly strong village-level communal bonds and institutions. That is, villagers subsisted on their own agricultural crops and other needs were provided by village craftsmen. Moreover vast tracts of land specially in the fertile plains of Southeast Asia were available for cultivation, pasture, hunting and firewoods, enabling villagers to develop strong communal ties that somehow eased political pressures from outside the village.

With the economic and technological ferment (e.g., advanced naval technology and weaponry) that underlay the Renaissance, Europe experienced a frenetic pace of development that soon spilled over its frontiers. The initial phase of extra-territorial expansion manifested itself in the growth of mercantile trade based primarily on spices and silk from the East. Asia, thus, experienced its first European invasions in the 15th and 16th centuries: the colonization of Asian coastal trading centres like Malacca (Malaysia), Goa (India) and Sri Lanka by Portugal; and Philippines by Spain.

It was not however until the late 18th and 19th centuries that western colonization began to seriously impinge on rural life and economy. The industrial revolution in Europe, which shifted power from the mercantile powers to the industrial countries (like Britain, France, and Germany), resulted in unparalleled overseas expansion and trade. By this time Europe was developing unified markets within its own frontiers. From to time to time however these internal markets were not able to absorb the growing output of the industries and supply could not keep pace with the voracious demand for inexpensive raw materials. It was in response to these needs that European powers turned menacingly to the East and a mad scramble for territorial possessions ensued. India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia were secured by the British; Spain tenaciously clung to the Philippines; and Thailand, though not formally subjugated, served the interests of Western powers by providing a buffer zone between the possessions of the feuding British and French.

This phase of western colonization was accomplished with a thoroughness that radically altered the pattern of life and development in traditional village communities of Asia. The influx of machine-made goods from leading industrial centres in Europe resulted in the systematic destruction of local industries that had begun to flourish in towns (as in India) and of village handicrafts that made for self-reliance in the villages. The subsistence economy of many rural communities gave way to monetization, transforming tradition-based reciprocal services into cash-generating commodities and reducing the peasants to indebtedness, bonded labour, and penury. Plantation economies that devoured vast tracts of lands for more efficient extraction of raw materials completed the dispossession of Asia's peasantry.

After varying lengths of time, independence was achieved from the colonial rulers. But for the bulk of the villagers, very little has changed. In most of the countries, it meant a simple transfer of political power from the western powers to the native landowning class, leaving virtually untouched the prevailing relationship of domination and dependence. Although others secured greater independence from colonial rule that enabled the local industrial bourgeosie to take over, the rural millions have nonetheless sunk deeper into the mire of poverty and degradation. Indeed none of these countries has achieved a high degree of industrialization. In Thailand, Philippines, and Malaysia, multinational corporations and local subsidiaries of foreign manufacturing firms lord it over, along with plantation corporations and the local landowning elites. In India and Sri Lanka, local capital has developed largely within the constrictions of foreign capital whose primary centre of power has now shifted from Europe to the United States.

All these have merely underlined the gravity and urgency of the rural problem. The record of most government rural development projects is however unenviable. Low productivity, malnutrition in the villages, inadequate infrastructures, and other problems that plague the countrysides of Asia are seen as isolated phenomena that lend themselves to piecemeal solutions. The result is a classic case of too little effort, too late. This is precisely because the very interests of those who formulate official policies tend to preclude any serious effort to systematically understand the nature of the rural predicament. Moreover government bureaucracy is often too cumbersome for any quick and satisfactory implementation of the already limited programmes for rural uplift.

The record of many church-related rural projects has not been a brilliant success either. Most are designed merely to complement already existing government programmes or are, at best, stop-gap measures that ignore the historical roots of rural poverty. Few have moved beyond the concept of charity and, those blazing new trails for rural development programmes are normally not given the offical encouragement they deserve. This is of course not too surprising in Asia, where the christian church has been historically an integral part of the colonial apparatus.

Rural poverty in Asia has, if anything, intensified over the years. However the peasants and the rural wage-workers have not always been impassive in the face of these onerous exactions. **Carved indelibly in the colonial and post-colonial history of Asia are instances of peasant resistance, which, while largely sporadic, bear ample witness to the creative powers that often lie untapped among the people. The task, then, is clear: to patiently draw out this creative force, nurture and temper it until it can on its own sustain itself in the conflict-ridden road ahead. For christians, specially, this presents another opportunity to heed the biblical call of liberation. That is, to identify, learn from, and link with the forces already engaged in the historical process of transformation and to enable these forces to overcome their isolation.** In practical terms, this means within the region, providing facilities for sharing of experiences, skills, information, and resources.

National situations, though basically similar, present varying priorities and possibilities. This calls for different approaches and strategies for action. However five systematic phases of rural development work have been considered strategically essential. Based on specific conditions in each of the five countries, rural youth programmes may put emphasis on any of the following areas of work:

1 **General awareness-building.** This marks the entry point from where one can move on to higher planes of action. Among most Christians, for instance, there is still a distressing lack of awareness of even the

rudiments of the Gospel's social message. Concerted effort must be made to educate christian congregations on the nature of rural poverty and christian responsibility in the face of his reality.

2. **Systematic analysis of the rural problem.** Any effective and meaningful programme must be based on a scientific understanding of society, i.e., identification of the oppressive structures within the historical context. This is also useful for the purpose of working, learning, and teaching among grassroots groups.

3. **Training of rural youth cadres.** Fieldworkers in villages need to develop sufficient maturity, integrity, and discipline. They must be equipped with both ideological tools and proper skills for effective work among peasants and agricultural workers. Training should be both theoretical and practical for only in the merger of the two will meaningful action come from.

4. **Organization and political education.** Those resisting oppression cannot do so as isolated individuals. To use, expand and claim legitimate rights people must know the value and techniques of organized pressure. As organizing for action is often limited to small issues, effort must be made to educate villagers on the long-term goals of social transformation.

5. **Building solidarity links and a network of support groups.** Groups and communities engaged in various forms of rural struggle must draw inspiration and strength from each other. Moreover, since the rural struggle is just part of the total historical process of humanization, it must be linked with the struggle of the workers, slum-dwellers, cultural minorities, youth organizations, and religious support groups. □

In the 1760s, the East India Company was predominant on the Coromandel coast and unchallenged ruler of Bengal. Subsequent wars against the Marathas, Mysoreans and Sikhs rendered it supreme throughout the Subcontinent. After the great revolt in north India (1857–58) the company ceded government to the British Crown. In 1870, Queen Victoria became Empress of an empire comprising "British India" and a patchwork of "native states."

The independence movement, whose most famous figure was Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, culminated in the recovery of Independence on August 15, 1947, when the Subcontinent was divided into the new states of India and Pakistan. India, under Jawaharlal Nehru, was a leading exponent of neutralism but became involved in disputes in the 1960s with Pakistan over Kashmir, and with China over extensive tracts of mountain territory on India's northern frontier. Hostilities broke out again with Pakistan (over Bangladesh) in December 1971. Domestically, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her ruling Congress party have encountered one crisis after another. India exploded its first nuclear device in May 1974. In the face of what she described as "a serious opposition plot" to undermine public security and topple her Government, Mrs Gandhi declared a State of Emergency in June 1975. Hundreds of her opponents were subsequently arrested and censorship of the press introduced.

INDIA

Introduction

".... any individual and group existentially involved in various situations of oppression is posed with this fundamental choice: either make a conscious choice to work alongside with the oppressed in complete identification with them ... or uncorsciously perpetuate the same relation of exploitation and domination in defiance of man's historical vocation, i.e., humanization."

It is with this challenging note that the report on rural oppression in India begins.

Disdaining the use of empirical investigation and data-gathering for which there was neither time, money nor inclination, the writers of the report employed instead class analysis like a surgical scalpel to cut swiftly and deeply into Indian society, laying it bare and exposing the multi-layered tiers of social classes that have foistered themselves on the common Indian — making him what he is today, a miserable excuse for a human being, surviving but not quite living.

The study basically centers on a rigorous historical analysis of people's movements within the context of Indian economic development. In particular it traces the rise (and fall) of peasant and youth movements against the background of the national movement for independence from British colonial domination.

It provides illuminating insights into the failures as well as potentials of these various movements on the basis of which guidelines for effective action can evolve. What follows is an abridged version of the original report.

Indian Independence Movement

British colonial rule in India served the dual function of providing a field for local Indian-based British capital and as market for British cotton piece goods and engineering material required for railway construction. **Colonization radically altered the existing or indigenous property relations and turned India into an agricultural colony. That is, Indian industries were destroyed to facilitate the entry of machine-made goods from Britain into the Indian market, denuding the towns of its population and prompting a mass exodus of people from the towns to the countrysides precisely at a time when the reverse was taking place in Britain.**

At the same time, a series of social groups grew in India which developed vested interest in the perpetuation of British rule. These groups served as indigenous base of colonialism:

1) big agrarian property whose reproduction depended upon the legal apparatus of colonialism;
2) merchant-usurer capital, whose interest lay in the furthering of the process of forced commercialization and in the fiscal exploitation of the peasants; and
3) the comprador trading capital who profited from the export of raw materials and the influx of machine-made commodities from Britain.

Introduction of the railways and the colonial educational system further strengthened the stranglehold of British rule.

However, over a period of time opposition to British rule emerged. Between the 18th and the late 19th centuries, the centers of expansion in the economies of the colonizing countries shifted from the market for consumer items to market for capital goods. In India, indigenous capital was quick to take advantage of the slight change of momentum in the entry of consumer goods from Britain and began to fill the demand initially created by British exports. Thus by import substitution, Indian capital got its first expansion. This was not to go unhampered however and conflict with the British colonial state was inevitable. Increasingly, the native industrial bourgeosie lay helpless in the face of onerous colonial restrictions on tariff policy, currency, shipping, and subsidies. It was this conflict that lay at the heart of the Indian Independence Movement.

It was clear to the Indian capital that in the long term its expansion as an independent class required a transfer of power from the colonial bourgeosie to its own political representatives. Throughout the period of national struggle this basic contradiction between the bourgeosie and the colonial state predominated over short term interests they might have shared in labour legislation, in preventing strikes, and in excluding communists from the trade unions. The sharpening of this antagonism eventually merged with the transformation of the Indian National Congress from a liberal constitutionalist club to a mass movement of national dimensions. The program of indigenous capital for independence and for post-independent economic development for India became the crux around which the nationalist movement got organized. The British had by this time already built up a state apparatus with its crystallized and long established financial, military and bureaucratic modes. Hence the task of acquiring independence from colonial rule called for mobilization of mass pressure on the colonial state to compel it to negotiate concessions. **It is within this context that the Gandhian movement, based on an ideology of pacifist opposition to imperialism, emerged — articulating and cementing the**

alliance between the bourgeois leadership of the Congress Party and the urban and rural middle class who constituted their social base. The Gandhian ideology saw to it that the question of independence would be, not a violent overthrow of the British colonial system and concomitantly, an internal social revolution, but a peaceful transfer of power from the British capitalists to Indian capitalists.

Peasant Movements

After independence and for an initial period of time, a quiet and peaceful development took place in India. In fact, quite a rapid industrialization developed for a country which began its process of industrialization in an era of international competition and multinational corporations. But the internal balance of social forces and the world economy were not conducive to this process and Indian capital very soon ran against huge contradictions which it was unable to solve.

In viewing these contradictions, it is important to look back at the huge movement of peasants whose climax stretches well into 1951. The reference is to the huge *Telengana Movement* in Hyderabad which had its origins in the closing decades of the first half of the 20th century. This is not to say that there were no peasant movements prior to this period. In fact during the last 200 years there must have been at least 77 peasant revolts which, while sporadic and often localized, did engage several thousand peasants in active support or combat.

The *Telengana Movement*, which embraced more than 300,000 peasants was essentially started by a group of liberal intellectuals who organized themselves into the *Andhra Maha Sabha* Movement, a movement aimed at administrative reforms, civil liberties, better educational facilities etc. Economically their interest lay in the destruction of a layer of huge landowners (owning 2,000 — 160,000 acres) known as the *Deshmukhs*. They articulated the interest of the emerging agrarian bourgeosie who had taken to capitalist farming as opposed to feudal landlordism and who aimed at direct cultivation for profit. The new agrarian bourgeoisie rode on the wave of peasant discontent and under the leadership of the *Andhra Maha Sabha* Movement and the Communist Party of India, staged peasant revolts that were later quelled by the Indian Army. The movement was of course doomed from the very start since it was led by those classes which had vested interests in continuing exploitation, albeit in different form. Moreover it did not have any support from workers in industrial centers, isolating it from the other oppressed masses.

While the *Telengana Movement* in 1951 was good omen to the Indian capital, the lateness of India's capitalist development frustrated

the dream of Indian capital at the very outset. It attempted to mobilize resources by encouraging the growth of the public sector, i.e., state-owned industries, since the private capital did not have sufficient resources to invest in infra-structural industries. It also hoped to accumulate capital through foreign aid and investment, taxes, and inflationary measures. Its greatest hope however lay in the agrarian sector. So it set about a slow transformation of Indian agriculture, squeezing as much cash money from the rural to the urban sectors. **Unlike Britain and France, where capitalism developed by smashing feudalism, in India capitalism had to develop by converting these pre-industrial elements into capitalist elements. Hence it has given rise to an utterly different, 'combined' social formation in which the most highly developed achievements of capitalist techniques and structures are integrated into social relations of feudal and pre-feudal origins, transforming and dominating them, fashioning a unique relationship of classes. It could not smash pre-capitalist relations by an internal social revolution for it feared the local forces it would unleash.**

Since capitalism has developed in India by maintaining pre-capitalist relations of production albeit in mutated form, the peasantry has been subjected to further impoverishment. Not only have they suffered from the very process of capitalism, they have also been subjected to a more intensified pre-capitalist relations of exploitation, basically by merchant and usurer's capital. This, alongside with the economic crisis of 1965-67, touched off a series of peasant movements in different parts of India — the most prominent of them being the *Naxalbari* movement in West Bengal and the *Srikakulam* uprising in Andhra Pradesh. Both the *Srikakulam* and *Naxalbari* movements in their initial stages influenced many intellectuals and students and Maoism was thus born in India. To many of these Maoists however, it was not at all a question of the analysis of the Indian situation that was the key to the process of social transformation, but rather, the in-toto implementation of the 'Chinese road to revolution.' Disregarding the very Maoist principle of fashioning a mass movement rooted in the concrete experiences of the people, the *Naxalbari* movement and their supporters underestimated and misunderstood both the development of Indian capitalism and the political control of the Indian capital. Moreover, they tried to simply spread the movement outside West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh (areas which have already some tradition of militant peasant movements) without patiently allowing the masses to ripen, thereby reducing the movement to mindless killing and terrorism. No other social class moved in solidarity with these peasants; no political party lifted its finger in their defence. Even Communist parties, at least in Bengal, were so provoked they aided the government to repress the *Naxalbari* movement. The price that they had to pay for this was extremely high: a virtual massacre of their cadres, a smashing of whatever peasant base they have organized.

Youth and Student Movements

The development of capitalism in agriculture resulted in the release of labour force from the agricultural sector. This came as a result of the eviction of tenants by landlords who found self-cultivation more profitable. Small landowning peasants were also increasingly eased out of their property by the vicious grip of usurer capital. **This landless labour, finding only seasonal employment in the countrysides, began to migrate towards cities looking for jobs, which industries alone could provide. But in India, the industries proved incapable of absorbing them, giving rise to phenomenal numbers of unemployed youth. For the first time, vast stratum of students and intellectuals emerged, representing a volcano — simmering with discontent and ready to explode at a moment's notice.**

The movement of this social stratum however is unpredictable. It moves to the left when the basic social classes are on the move (e.g., *Naxalbari* and *Srikakulam*) and in the absence of any movement from the workers and the peasants, this amorphous social stratum tends to move to the right (e.g., Gujarat and Bihar in the 70's).

A recent phenomenon that requires more than casual mention is the emergence of a number of youth action groups that continue to search for a viable alternative to present-day Indian society. Unlike traditional social visionaries, they refuse to be prisoners of fixed, rigid ideologies that are the common fare of the dominant communist parties in India. These groups have been engaged in the twin task of learning from the mistakes of the peasant and labour movements and of going out of the towns into the villages to seek identification and work with the oppressed. A quick review of these various youth groups — their composition, objectives, and problems — now follows.

One visible group of young people is composed of urban students whose main concern is the alien and alienating mode of education, one of the more lasting legacies of British colonization. The questioning of the educational system had led them very soon to the questioning of the general social system prevailing in India, of which education is only a part. Seeking education by living with the oppressed, they moved from slums to casual workers to villages. But this very process of searching for answers to the problems of the Indian society has also developed in them an incapacity to build any structure that could sustain their organizational needs. They have been thoroughly disgusted with structures around them (of society, of college, of family) that they have found it impossible to get sufficiently organized, with disastrous consequences.

Another group has had its origin in the villages. A section of the big landlords' sons, having undergone a process of radicalization in the ur-

ban colleges, defied their class origins and went back to their native villages to organize the landless around the issue of grabbing the fallow government land. Being situated in an area where there has been a tradition of peasant movement, they were able to make at least initially, substantial progress in neighbouring villages. However, they have failed to establish genuine rapport with the people they had hoped to organize and a serious gap continued to exist between the leadership and the peasants.

A third group of politically mature urban and rural youths studying in the cities have worked among the tribals who have lost their land to the money lenders. This group sought to organize the tribals against the money lender/landlord combine but the failure to conscientize the tribals have muted their legitimate struggles.

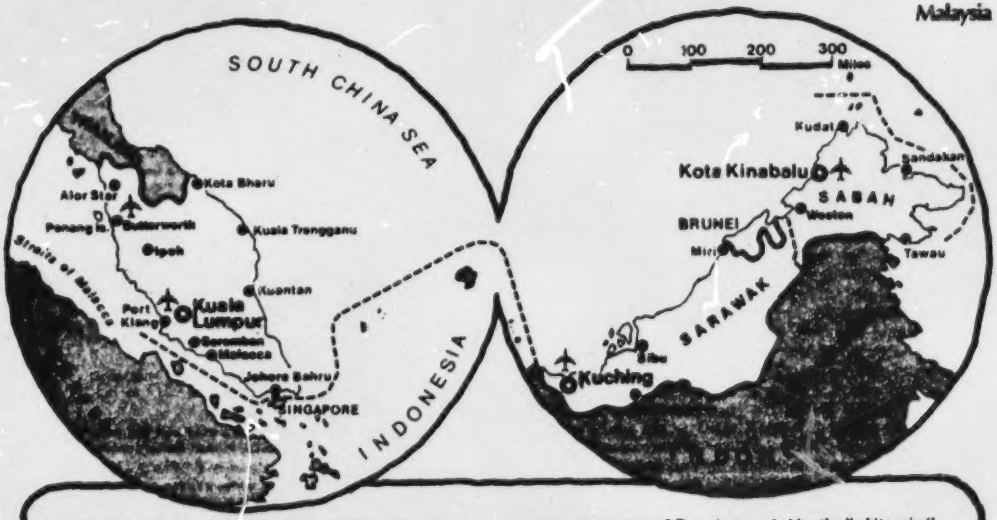
Conclusion

The history of India has amply demonstrated that social transformation is not an act of an isolated individual, group or movement; but rather a total social act carried on by all the oppressed together. The bane of the peasant movement has always been its isolation from the other oppressed sectors of society, particularly the workers. Youth and student groups that now symbolize the new radicalism are likewise constantly plagued by their isolation from one another.

The major task then is to learn from the lessons of history, to analyse systematically the errors of the people's movements; to identify and work alongside with those groups (be they urban-based or rural) already engaged in the historical process of social transformation; and finally, to explore ways by which these groups can overcome their isolation. □

— by S.N. Balu

Land area: 3,283,439 sq. km. (cultivated 1.7m sq. km., forest 660,000 sq. km.).
States: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal.
Union Territories: Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Dadra & Nager Haveli, Delhi, Goa, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep islands, Mizoram, Pondicherry.
Population: (75, est.): 613m. Population under 15: 42%. Urban: 120m (20.6%); Major cities: Calcutta, 7.03m; Greater Bombay, 6m; Delhi, 3.64m; Madras, 3.17m; Hyderabad, 1.8m; Ahmedabad, 1.75m; Bangalore, 1.7m; Kanpur, 1.3m; Poona, 1.11m.
Birth rate per 1,000: 39. **Death rate per 1,000:** 14.
School places: Primary, 66.7m; Secondary, 25m; Tertiary, 3m.
Hospital beds per 1,000: 0.5. **Doctors per 1,000:** 0.25.
TV sets per 1,000: 0.5. **Radio receivers per 1,000:** 26.
Cinema seats per 1,000: 9.
Telephones per 1,000: 3. **Motor cars per 1,000:** 1.08.



Situated on the important international trade routes between Europe and the Middle East, India, China and Japan, the Malay states came under Portuguese and Dutch influence until the British arrived in 1786, acquiring Penang by treaty with the Sultan of Kedah and establishing British rule in the last quarter of the 19th century. These states still maintain a separate existence, mostly under their own sultans. Many Chinese and Indians arrived during the British period and after World War II. In 1957, Malaya gained independence within the British Commonwealth. Sabah was ruled by the British North Borneo Company, which turned it into a large rubber producer, from 1882 until the Japanese occupation in 1942. Sarawak, as a result of successive concessions by the sultans of Brunei, was ruled by the "white rajas" of the Brooke family from the 1840s to 1942. Both were British colonies between 1945 and 1963.

The Federation of Malaysia, now comprising Malaya (West Malaysia), Sabah and Sarawak (formerly British Borneo and now East Malaysia), came into existence on September 16, 1963. Recently, Malaysia has worked towards securing the region as a zone of peace and neutrality. It became the first ASEAN country to recognise China in 1974. Communist insurgents in 1975 stepped up their campaign by launching attacks in urban areas. In Sabah, a political crisis was followed by the resignation of controversial Chief Minister Tun Mustapha.

MALAYSIA

Introduction

Most of Malaysia is rural and the majority of its people live in *kampongs*, rubber estates, oil palm plantations, fishing villages, small paddy farms, and jungle settlements. In other countries, this condition would have triggerred off a spate of rural-oriented programs with myriad offerings of technologies, entertainment and aid. In Malaysia, however, with the exception of usual government initiatives, there have been very few such programs. Perhaps due to the cultural, economic, and political conditions peculiar to Malaysian society, private individuals and groups have either shied away from such programs or have over-looked the need for it. This has left a big void in an area where much could be done to help improve the lot of the rural poor.

It is in an attempt to fill part of the void that we have pieced out together through this report some general descriptive notes on both West and East Malaysia, a limited survey of rural youth in West Malaysia, and some observations about the churches' role in rural development. This study is primarily intended to provide general guidelines for effective work among rural youth.

Library work, field observation and interviews form the basis of this report.

Racial Problem in Malaysian Society

Malaysia is made up of two distinct regions: West Malaysia or Peninsular Malaysia (consisting of the Malay peninsula which extends from Thailand to Singapore) and East Malaysia, which comprises the federal states of Sarawak and Sabah on the island of Kalimantan (Borneo). The distinction between these two regions is not just a geographical one as we will see in the course of this report.

Three major races or ethnic groups make up the population of Malaysia: the native Malays or *Bumiputras* (a local world for "sons of the soil"), the Chinese and the Indians. Peninsular Malaysia has a population of 9.18 million of which 52.7% are *Bumiputras*, 35.8% are Chinese, 10.7% are Indians, and .08% are of mixed or other races. East Malaysia has a majority of ethnic Malays better known by their tribal groups, e.g., *Kadazan*, etc., and Chinese settlers. The convergence of these three racial groups has earned Malaysia the reputation of being the 'melting pot' of Asia. On the contrary however ethnic identities have remained very pronounced. Great differences in culture and

religion separate the people and the relationship between the races is tense and brittle. Racial differences are aggravated by the much bruited Chinese control of the local economy. The Malaysia Five-Year Plan, introduced by the government in 1970, in fact, aimed at correcting alleged "racial economic imbalances". But at the end of the Five Year Plan the government gave official recognition to the fact that " ... inequality between races contributed to only a small proportion of the total inequality of income in the country..." (*Economic Report*, 1974-75). That is, within the races, the disparity is not so much between Chinese and Malays, but rather between rich Chinese and poor Chinese, and between rich Malays and poor Malays.

The existing tensions between the races have been taken advantage of, abetted, and perpetuated by vested groups which stand to gain, and keep themselves in power under such conditions. Tensions have also been heightened by the general inertia of most people to possible solutions, and the mutual suspicions among the races.

The Rural Economy

The rural poor, whether in the vast estates of West Malaysia or in the settlements of Sabah and Sarawak, bear the brunt of poverty. *Economic Report* underscores that "the agriculture and agricultural products sector together accounted for 73.7% of total poverty in Malaysia." It is clear from all economic surveys that rural people have not shared in the economic growth of the country over the past 13 years.

Poverty in rural Malaysia stems largely from an economy which is extremely dependent on foreign aid, imports, and investments. For instance, about 75% of the country's wealth is foreign-controlled. Contributing to this is the emphasis on the cultivation of agricultural crops (e.g., rubber) for export which have continually suffered price fluctuations in the world market. Plantations which are normally closely tied with multinational corporations, which consume raw materials in the rich countries, are of course not hurt by these price fluctuations but small landowners and farmers hardly survive. Moreover large amounts of public funds are funnelled to areas under plantation agriculture (which cultivate export crops) leaving only a trickle to areas where small farmers engage in subsistence agriculture (i.e., as in Sarawak).

Rural Youth in West Malaysia

A study-survey on rural youth was conducted by a graduate student in a southern state with a Malay majority and in a central state that is predominantly non-Malay, both of which in Peninsular Malaysia. The

data gathered during field interviews are of a general nature since the objective of the research, apart from the need to explore possibilities for work among rural youth, has not been sharply defined. Those interviewed were in the age group of 18-25, most of whom have finished basic schooling and are unemployed or looking for job opportunities. The reporter classified the youth according to their ethnic backgrounds and made the following outline of their profile:

1) **INDIANS.** They are found mainly in plantations and estates tapping rubber, reminiscent of their forefathers recruited from India to work in the plantations. They rarely leave the confines of the estates nor do they mix freely with others of different racial ancestry. The average drop-out rate from schools is rather high and many of them hang around the plantations idly, drinking illegally distilled alchoholic drink called *samsu.* An occasional respite from drinking would be playing football.
Due to the isolating influence of life within the estate, most Indian youth are hardly aware of social and political issues. They think they can do little about their economic problem as they are merely hapless victims. They thus prefer to keep to themselves and leave politics alone.

2) **MALAYS.** Most of them live in kampongs and small villages. Like the Indians, many drop out of school at an early age and seek part-time jobs or seasonal employment. Many fail to find jobs and take to drugs. In fact drug addiction appears to be one of the more prevalent social problems among Malay young people. Many drug-users interviewed pointed to their frustrations as reason for drug-use/abuse. A number of them felt there was little to look forward to in the villages and would grab the first opportunity to migrate to the cities.

   It will take sometime for most Malay youth to realize the disturbing extent of Western and Japanese economic interests in Malaysia since the Chinese have traditionally been made scapegoats for their economic backwardness. This is not to deny the fact that a growing number of Malay youth are becoming aware of some form of class struggle (i.e., between the rich and the poor *Bumiputras).*

3) **CHINESE.** While the drop-out rate from school among Chinese youth in villages is not much lower than the Indians and Malays, many of them are rarely idle and are in one way or the other engaged in trade or some other sources of livelihood. They also show greater initiative and stronger sense of purpose.

   The research seems to confirm the general observation that Chinese youth are not too reluctant to start from the bottom and

sometimes feel constrained to do so, believing that in Malaysian society, few opportunities (i.e., education, jobs in the civil service, etc.) are open to them. Indeed they feel very discriminated against by and hence resent many official policies.

Chinese youth also keep some distance from other racial groups, somewhat reciprocating the not too friendly attitudes of the Indians and Malays.

The survey concluded that by and large there are numerous possibilities for effective work among rural youth. **Education and political consciousness-raising is a prime task but given the general apathy and reluctance to be engaged in anything remotely political, it is wise to start with programs that provide merely social services (vocational school and tuition classes) and basic amenities (recreation facilities).**

Role of Church in Rural Development

On the whole, the christian churches in Malaysia, particularly the West, are predominantly urban in orientation. They have very little base for work in the rural areas. The church program that comes nearest rural work is that done in the estates, more of an evangelistic program and has little bearing on the economic uplift of the rural poor. This is not surprising, however, considering that christianity is a minority religion in a place where Islam is the state religion, and where most non-Malays are either Buddhists or Hindus.

The situation in East Malaysia varies slightly. In Sabah and Sarawak most churches are rural-based and there is growing interest in rural development programs. A case in point is church-sponsored Rural Life Development Center which seeks to promote developmental change in rural communities by encouraging local grassroots leadership, community cooperation, and self-reliance. Although beset by difficulties and slow pace of work, not to mention occasional harassment from local police and government officials, this program promises some possibilities for rural work in Malaysia.

Conclusion

This report has explored in some general ways possibilities for rural programs among Malaysian youth. It is limited in that it is not based on a rigorous scientific analysis of the peasant predicament in Malaysia. Neither does it examine the emerging militancy of the students who, in December 1974 organized a well-publicized mass action together with workers and peasants to protest the reported starvation of villagers in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia. Given

these limitations, the paper has desisted from making clear-cut recommendations on action-program thrusts and emphases. What is offered are a few general notes on the rural situation in Malaysia from where discussion can proceed and deeper questions (e.g., social and historical analysis) probed. □

— by **Chin San Seong & Basi Bhaskaran**

Land area: Peninsular Malaysia 50,806 sq. m. (cultivated 10,930 sq. m., forest 30,400 sq. m., urban 530.1 sq. m.). Sabah and Sarawak 76,510 sq. m.
States: 13 (Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis, Pahang, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Melaka, Pulau Pinang, Johore, Sabah, Sarawak).
Population: 11.7 m. Population under 15 (Peninsular Malaysia only, 73): 4,080,606. Major cities: Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, Melaka, Johore Bahru, Kuantan, Kota Bahru, Seremban. Kuching, Kota Kinabalu.
Birth rate per 1,000 (73): 33.3. **Death rate per 1,000:** 6.9
School places (Peninsular Malaysia only, 72): Primary, 1,500, 152; Secondary, 595,576; Tertiary, 35,947.
Hospital beds per 1,000: 3.01. **Doctors per 1,000:** 0.2.
Radio and Television licenses per 1,000: 70.
Telephones per 1,000: 20.9 **Motor cars per 1,000:** 33.3.

The Philippines declared independence on June 12, 1898, after centuries of Spanish domination, only to fall quickly into the hands of another colonising power, the United States. Although the revolutionary leader General Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed independence, it was Manuel Quezon who fought consistently for self-rule in the halls of the US Congress and secured legislation promising independence.

Japan occupied the country from 1942–45. Quezon, who left with General Douglas MacArthur when Corregidor was about to fall and established a refugee government in Washington, died before the war ended. His vice-president Sergio Osmena, returned with Gen. MacArthur to re-establish the commonwealth government. The Republic of the Philippines was proclaimed on July 4, 1946, with Manuel Roxas as the first president, but Independence Day is celebrated on the anniversary of the 1898 declaration.

An attempt by the communist-led Hukbalahaps (Huks) to overthrow the Government in the late 1940s and early 1950s was crushed by Ramon Magsaysay, who later became President. However, Huk-inspired dissidence persisted in central Luzon for the next 20 years.

Ferdinand Marcos, who won renown as a guerilla fighter during the Japanese occupation, was elected President (Nacionalista Party) on November 9, 1965. In the elections of November 1969, Marcos secured a record majority and on August 21, 1971, he ordered the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, declaring that the nation was threatened by communist subversion. The Marcos Administration then stepped up its insistence that an armed uprising was being planned and, on September 21, 1972, Marcos imposed martial law, detaining his bitterest critics, some of whom are still being held. In June 1975, the Philippines, became the second ASEAN country, after Malaysia, to recognise China.

PHILIPPINES

Introduction

The day-to-day trials and tribulations of the average Filipino peasant are chronicled in *Rural Youth in the Philippines*, a 102-paged booklet documenting case studies of nineteen barrios (villages) spread over the country. **The various case studies invariably argue the point that the Filipino peasant must be self-empowered as an organized group if they are to pry themselves loose from centuries of bondage.**

The study (conducted from October 1975 to March 1976) was undertaken primarily to provide adequate information on village life which will serve as basis for action-strategies involving rural youth. The survey covers five diverse geographical and cultural regions: Northern Luzon, Central Luzon, Southern Tagalog, Eastern Mindanao, and Western Mindanao. Each case study examines land ownership and land use; working conditions in the village; existing village youth organizations; and the role of the churches (mostly Catholic) in rural development.

The 19 villages were purposively selected on the basis of available primary grassroots contacts, whose familiarity with village life and access to village leaders facilitated participant observation. Financial limitation precluded random sampling that would involve the use of paid field interviewers. There was also the added constraint of a martial law situation which made the mobility of a non-government researcher difficult. Data were gathered by survey contacts who initiated group interviews and question-discussion methodology that ensured collective responses. The research instrument was a modification of a questionnaire already used previously to help identify local village oppressors. In this sense the instrument enjoyed field acceptability and content validity. The final streamlining and analysis of data had been undertaken by an editorial committee formed by the Philippine Ecumenical Rural Youth Committee, representing some key youth groups involved in work among rural youth.

Highlights of the findings are presented in this abstract, not as a comprehensive sysnthesis of the data gathered in the survey but as starting point for reflection.

General Background

A few significant statistics about the Philippines should provide some background to the findings of the survey.

The Philippines is an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands strewn over three major geographic divisions: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao-Sulu. The population is approximately 42 million, with an annual growth rate of 3.01%, one of the highest in the world. Of these 20.7 million are below 17.1 years old, indicating a high dependency rate. Filipinos are predominantly christian (more than 90%) and the Muslims, a significant minority in the southern region of Mindanao-Sulu. Christianity was introduced by Catholic Spain as part of its colonial design as early as the 16th century — and traces of colonial friarocracy are still evident in the villages covered by the survey.

Literacy rate is a high 83.4% although the compulsory public school system has laid stress on rote learning and western models (specifically, American) ill-adapted to Philippine needs. Until quite recently the medium of instruction was largely English and units in Castillan Spanish were required for any university degree.

Also relevant are some general notes on rural life and economy. Natural resources abound in the country, many of them hardly exploited. Its tropical weather and fertile plains yield diverse crops both for local consumption and export. Cultivation of major export crops (i.e., sugar and copra) has been intensified since the turn of the century to serve the colonial requirements of US manufacturing firms. Lucrative profits (that never trickle to the poor) derived from these export crops has meant using up vast tracts of land that would otherwise be planted to rice, the country's staple food.

Census reports indicate that 68 Filipinos out of every hundred live in the rural areas, where unemployment and underemployment reach a peak of 25% *(Ranis Mission Report)*. Most of them are gathered in fertile rice plains, sugar ***haciendas***, sprawling coconut plantations and coastal fishing villages. Some venture into *Kaingin* clearings and logging settlements.

Philippine economy is essentially agrarian, relying heavily on the export of raw materials. While light industries and manufacturing have mushroomed during the last decade, these have been largely confined to the Greater Manila area and are mainly local subsidiaries of foreign based industrial combines. Moreover strategic sectors of the economy (i.e., banking, mining and oil industry) remain in the hands of American and Japanese interests, consigning to the realm of myths the formal independence from American rule obtained in 1946. It is not within the scope of this research to explore in some detail the implications of continuing foreign control of Philippine life and economy, but it is within this perspective that the findings of the research must be viewed and understood.

Land Ownership

The case studies are replete with story after story of landless peasants, evicted tenants, cheated sharecroppers, seasonal workers on sugar lands (*sacadas*), rural squatters and *kaingeros* tilling forest clearings. Despite the Land Reform Program of the martial law administration, big landlords continue to flourish. Many tenants are also faced by eviction because, under threat of land reform, landlords have been converting their rice lands into sugar lands (the latter is not covered by land reform). Local capitalists who own the *tilladoras* and *kiskisans* have not been prevented from charging exhorbitant fees. And loan sharks of the barrio continue to ride high on the *50-50 share*, the *tampa*, and *hulugan* methods – dooming the villagers to perpetual indebtedness.

It is not exactly uncommon to find a barrio (as in Floridablanca, Pampanga) which is virtually one big *hacienda*, owned by a single family. Not too far from this barrio is another village where three families share proprietary rights over practically everything worth owning — from the rice and sugar fields, sugar centrals and rice mills to rural banks, *hacienda* stores, and hauling trucks. In still another village, the rural bank and cooperative are owned by the same landowning familes who lure the farmers into securing loans for fertilizers, pesticides, and chemicals that they themselves sell at prices that literally choke the farmers. Down south in Zamboanga, three families share ownership of a vast rubber plantation with an aggregate area of 2,400 hectares. And in Davao del Norte, farmers have been forced to lease their lands at a measly P250.00 to P500.00 (or US$30.00 — 60.00) per hectare per year to banana plantations. Those resisting have found their crops and working animals destroyed by chemicals sprayed from airplanes used in the adjoining plantations.

The Rural Struggle

Most peasants and rural wage earners would not be too different from other people who have known nothing but oppression all their lives. Suffering in silence, they can only look forward to some *swerte* (luck or windfall) which just might come their way.

However, not all peasants and rural folks have been impassive in the face of overwhelming odds. There always are groups which, in their own small ways, are trying to take it upon themselves to change their situation. The case studies abound with examples of rural organizations which in the late 60's and early 70's successfully protected themselves against various forms of abuses. The *Anak-Dagat* of a town bordering Laguna de Bay organized themselves against a landlord (now the town's mayor) who had acquired a fictitious title over

the foreshoreland that they were occupying. Labour unions were sprouting (although not without resistance from management) among timber and plantation workers in Zamboanga and Davao. Sugar mill workers were up against sugar barons and farmers' organizations were beginning to flourish.

Most of this incipient movement had been nipped in the bud by martial law decrees but not a few either have survived. One barrio in Central Luxon has had a long history of peasant resistance against landlord abuses dating as far back as Spanish times. The militancy of the villagers has not passed unnoticed and in 1950 during an intensified anti-insurgency campaign, the entire barrio was mercilessly razed to the ground. More recently an irate *hacendero* retaliated by sending off a barrio leader and council man to prison where he subsequently died of tuberculosis. All these do not seem to have fazed the villagers for at present an organized group has been mounting protests and filing complaints in local courts against threats of eviction by landlords. In just a neighbouring village, leaders of sugar mill workers a few years back were all hauled into jail for defying the martial law ban against strikes.

A Survey of Village Youth Organization

There is no shortage of youth groups and youth clubs in the barrios. They are always around soliciting contributions for village dances, organizing games during fiestas or doing relief work during floods and sundry others that the older folks would not be too eager to plunge into.

Under martial law, all villages have been instructed to set up chapters of *Kabataang Barangay*. Efforts are now being made to mobilize them to support government agrarian reforms (e.g., *Masagana 99* and *Samahang Nayon)* and a whole lot of service activities ranging from cleaning the barrios and promoting family planning. Most of the chapters however have not moved beyond interest in sports and are noticeable by their inactivity.

Most villages too have some sort of christian youth organizations. Often they are church-based groups organized for Sunday School lessons, fellowship and other parish-related activities (e.g., Christian Youth Fellowship and Methodist Youth Fellowship). The fact that they are related to a national program that emphasizes rural development makes them potentially creative. A few village chapters of the Student Catholic Action, though still basically service-oriented, are beginning to search beyond for more concrete expression of *love of neighbour*. And in the village of Mendez, another christian group has started a series of seminar on rural conscientization and organizing,

which though persistently beset by difficulties, show some potential for growth.

A few remnants of pre-martial law peasant-based youth organizations like the *KAKASA* of Sapang-Palay and junior chapters of the FFF are still active although their organizational activities have substantially slowed down. There appears to be greater promise in new youth groups that do not bear the stigma of pre-martial law activism. A few such youth groups composed of sons and daughters of peasants have sprung in the past year. Their main concern is to support their parents' struggle for effective implementation of the Land Reform Program, better working conditions, and better health and education facilities in the villages.

The Local Churches

Not much can be said of local church involvement in village life. In fact villagers in remote barrios rarely see a priest who comes only on occasional visit during feast days and special Catholic holidays. In a small village in Montevista, for instance, the Catholic priest has consigned most of his priestly responsibilities to the village *Kaabag*, a lay helper who handles bible services, communion, and baptism. Not too surprisingly, barrio folks would summarize christian preaching to three words: *pray, pay, and obey.*

While most village churches are apathetic to the misery of the rural poor, most of the material or moral support for innovative youth groups and peasant organizations have been provided by the religious sector.

NASSA, a Catholic social action program, has reached a few villages. Nuns and priests have been assisting in the education work of the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) and Protestant church-related persons have provided a great deal of support for the Mindanao Federation of Labour (MFL).

Conclusion: Towards a Program

The study sees as a major priority the need to organize young peasants and villagers for long-term awareness-building and effective socio-economic programs. Already the case studies have pointed to a rich variety of local issues around which mobilization of youth groups can start.

The research notes that actual experience in rural organizing in the Philippines is not adequate to draw helpful lessons from. This means two tasks are primary:

1) developing more viable techniques for organizing, combining the urban-tested CO (community organization) approach and core-formation (or cell-recruitment approach); and

2) adequate training of competent rural youth organizers and change agents.

As a concluding note, it must be noted that while the study offers ample documentation on agrarian economy, it has little by way of theoretical and historical analysis. That is, whatever analytical framework the researchers presume to have used (i.e., the semi-feudal, semi-colonial character of Philippine economy) has been no more than hinted at in the course of the report. □

— An abstract from a report by the
Philippine Ecumenical Rural Youth Committee.

Land area: 300,000 sq. km. (cultivated [73] 92,130 sq. km.; forest 139,000 sq. km.; urban 11,000 sq. km.).
Provinces: 74.
Islands: 7,107.
Population (est.): 42.8m. Population under 15: 18.5m. Major cities: Greater Manila, Davao, Cebu, Iloilo, Zamboanga, Bacolod, Tarlac, Angeles, Butuan, Cagayan de Oro.
Birth rate per 1,000 (est.): 41.
Death rate per 1,000 (est.): 11.4.
School places (71): Primary, 7.7m; Secondary, 1.7m; Tertiary, 704,000.
Hospital beds per 1,000: 1.6. **Doctors per 1,000:** 0.3.

The Portuguese arrived in Ceylon at the beginning of the 16th century. They settled on the west coast and converted many of the inhabitants to Christianity. One hundred years later they were replaced by the Dutch who occupied most of the coastal region; only the kingdom of Kandy in the centre of the country retained its independence. The Dutch were evicted by the British, to whom Kandy surrendered in 1815. The country became independent on February 4, 1948, and on May 22, 1972, the Republic of Sri Lanka was created. Since 1972, its life has been action packed with radical socialist measures introduced by Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike's coalition, including land reforms, the appointment of political authorities and a production war on the food and industrial fronts. But the oil crisis and rising prices on international markets in past years made the benefits minimal.

SRI LANKA

Introduction

What follows is an over-all view of the rural situation in Sri Lanka today drawn and systematized from a report that dwells on:

1) the politico-economic structures of rural society;
2) the role of Sri Lankan youth in the struggle for social change; and
3) a survey of some programs on rural development, with emphasis on collective farming.

Data for this report were mainly derived from library research although limited participant observation and unstructured interviews in the field had been of substantial help.

The study starts from the premise that rural problems are deeply rooted in the colonial history of the country. Historically, the traditional *Sinhala* village during pre-colonial times functioned by means of a closely interlocking system of rights and duties that ensured the villager a sense of security, identity, and responsibility. A fundamental characteristic of the village economy was the non-monetary form of exchange. **While the pre-colonial Sri Lankan society was not exactly paradise lost, it was a society developing on its own pace—unhampered from without and held promise for the future.** The advent of British colonialism disrupted all these — replacing the village with the town, as the central economic unit; and transforming reciprocal services, based on village-level communal institutions, into commodities for profit. The concomitant introduction of plantation economy also resulted in the accumulation and consolidation of landed properties which left many without land and others with barely enough to eke out a marginal existence.

Politico-Economic Structures of Rural Society in Sri Lanka

Most of Sri Lanka, in geographical terms, is rural (about 85% of the total land area). This is also true in terms of population distribution, where the huge majority of its thirteen million population live in the villages — picking tea leaves, tapping rubber, gathering coconuts, farming rice-paddies, or fishing.

Most villagers do not own the land they till — either working for plantation estates or for landlords as wage labourers and share-

croppers. In any case the wage they receive is barely enough, the share is unequally divided, and the harvest meager. Landlords who live in urban comfort, sponge off the fruits of labour of those who toil their lives away in the farms.

Rural poverty is aggravated by the subordination of the villages to the towns. Exploitation of the countryside by the towns and cities manifests itself in many forms, the most vicious being the adverse terms of trade. For instance, the urban trader and the transport contractor make excessively huge profits from the double-edged practice of buying farm produce at low prices on one hand, and on the other, of selling cheap manufactured items to the villagers at exhorbitant prices. Thus a bushel of paddy is sold by the farmer for Rs. 33.00 while a cotton shirt or *sarong* will cost him about the same price. The dairyman earns less than a rupee for a pint of milk while a bottle of aerated water costs twice that amount.

The Parliament government, which has a strong representation from socialist parties (i.e., the LSSP or Trotskyite Party), has systematically wooed labour and peasant votes by taking redressive measures through legislation, e.g., consumer and service cooperatives, land reform, rural banking, state marketing schemes, price guarantees for agricultural commodities, extension and advisory services, district development councils, and decentralized budgeting. However, most of these reforms have been nullified because they have not adequately touched the basic economic and social relations on which precisely hinge the exploitative and unjust social system that utlimately causes rural poverty and misery. Besides, many of the government-run services have given rise to unnecessary and cumbersome bureaucracies that further serve to make things more difficult for the ordinary villager. For example, in obtaining loans from the state-run rural banks and cooperatives, the bureaucratic formalities so frustrate the borrower that eventually he turns to moneylenders (usually the local trader) at very usurious rates.

The Caste System and Religion

Cultural factors like the caste system and religion have served to maintain and sanctify the oppressive structures that obtain in the villages and elsewhere. The growth of commercial capitalism, imposed by British colonial rule, has not led to the complete dissolution of pre-colonial and pre-capitalist social and economic relationships. On the contrary, the limited and distorted development of capitalism went hand in hand with indigenous feudal structures, particularly characterized by the stultifying influence of the caste system. This has continued to prevent persons from advancing beyond the limits of one's caste and caste boundaries cannot be crossed with impunity. Thus *Goyigamas,* a dominant caste, still own most of the land and other

castes like the *Wahumpura* and the *Batgama* are shut off, by virtue of their castes, from positions of political leadership.

Religion in Sri Lanka has drawn attention away from the concrete day-to-day problems that the villagers face. **Churches specially have been direct beneficiaries of the prevailing system (Buddhism is the official state religion). Until recently, vast tracts of land had been owned by Buddhist temples known as Visharagams and Devalagams. In some parts of the country today, temple lands are still tilled by farmers who render honorary work.** Christian churches, although a small minority (8.3% of the population) have historically enjoyed privileges, identified as they are with the westernized English-speaking elite. They were therefore the first to have opposed progressive legislation that endangered their privileged position (i.e., nationalization of schools).

A small minority of christians have been involved in self-criticism discarding the elements of religion that perpetuate the status quo and experimenting with a lifestyle that is in closer accord with the Christian Gospel. Some are involved in a more organized approach (i.e., the Christian Workers' Fellowship which works among workers); others are individuals struggling with the masses as expression of their personal religious vocation.

Role of Youth in the Rural Struggle

The youth (below 30 years of age) comprise 60% of the total population. Economic surveys confirm that 82.6% of the unemployed (whose ages range from 15 to 64) are under the age of 25. Rural youth account for nearly 65% of the total unemployed.

Worth noting is the relatively high degree of literacy among youth, thanks to three recent major educational reforms. free education, *swabasha* policy, and nationalization of schools. Great disparities however remain between educated rural and urban youth. Students in urban areas go to English-speaking elitist government schools or christian private colleges which are considered roads to power and prestige; while rural youth attend classes in *Sinhala* culture government schools which offer inferior educational facilities. Unemployment has therefore become the lot of many Sinhala-educated rural youth, and dissatisfaction with this state of affairs reached desperate heights in the insurgency which nearly toppled the government in 1971.

A statistical analysis of more than 10,000 youths questioned for alleged participation in the 1971 insurgency is quite revealing 77% were between the ages of 19-25; 78.6% had gone through secondary education; and 36.3% had completed it. Moreover 80% of the youths were products of *Sinhala* government schools, indicating that the in-

surgency was dominated by rural *Sinhala* educated youth. It also signified a remarkably high degree of political consciousness among Sri Lanka's rural youth.

Survey of Rural Youth Development Programs

If there is anything illustrative of Sri Lanka, it is the proliferation of rural youth programs/projects sponsored either by the government or some other private organisations. Most of these projects fall under three categories:

1) those aimed at increasing production (of crops, etc.) and providing self-help and improvement, i.e., government youth settlement schemes and YMCA's Self-Employment Program in Rural Areas (SEPRA);

2) community development projects such as *Asohapuna, Udagira, Nevajeevan* and *Saria Yadarga;* and

3) youth centres for agricultural and technical training, e.g., the Eastern Training Institute, the *Christodava* Farm, and the YMCA Youth and Agricultural Training Center at Paranthan.

More recently, experiments in collective farming have been drawing serious attention. These experiments aim to create new human relationships through collective ownership and collective decision-making. Two such programs are here briefly described: the Devasarana Collective Farm and the government farm in Serima Pura.

The **Devasarana** farm started as an ordinary *ashram* or christian monastery in a predominantly Buddhist village, carrying out the usual monastic activities of inculcating ascetic discipline, prayer, meditation, and manual labour. It also sought to bring the Christians into some kind of dialogue with the Buddhists and other religious groups. In 1970 the *ashram* became involved in action-oriented discussions on land reform organized by People's committees. It was in these discussions that the idea of a collective farm first germinated. Now the collective farm is one of the few existing models of socialist production, and, despite its many limitations, continues to serve as a center of ideological formation for farmers and students in the vicinity and to provide opportunities for dialogue and sharing among villagers and visiting youths.

The collective farm at **Serima Pura** is one of the twenty farms set up by the government after the abortive insurgency in 1971 to resettle the former youth insurgents. It is one of the biggest government collective farms, with a membership of about a thousand and whose total land area covers 2,750 acres. For purposes of management it is subdivided

into four smaller farms, each of which is in turn subdivided into ten production teams. The bureaucracy is so stifling that simple decisions on production techniques, grain varieties, types of fertilizers, etc., are made by various government offices like the Fertilizer Board and Paddy Board. Moreover, as its critics would be quick to point, the collective farm remains as a socialist ghetto in a capitalist environment and continues to exhibit contradictions within the capitalist economy. For instance farmers retain individualistic rights on income derived from the produce of the farms.

Conclusion

Traditional socialist parties in Sri Lanka have continued to ignore the peasantry. **The lesson of the 1971 insurrection is clear: the rural populace are a tremendous force for social change. Educational and organizational work among them must be stepped up and links between them and the urban workers strengthened.**

Along this line, collective farm projects (specially those that are unhampered by official bureaucracy) offer great promise. There is need however to critically examine these various experiments in collective farming (which are by no means faultless) and to systematically draw lessons from them. There is need likewise to link many of the young farmers engaged in collective farming for mutual sharing and support. The time is auspicious for experiments of this nature since the government is, at least officially, encouraging collective farms. □

— by Peter Rezel

Land area: 65,608 sq. km. (cultivated 5.39m sq. km.).
Population (est.): 14.2m. Population under 15 (est.): 5.6m. Major cities: Colombo, Kandy, Galle, Jaffna, Trincomalee.
Birth rate per 1,000 (est.): 27.3.
Death rate per 1,000 (est.): 8.9.
School places: 2.6m.
Hospital beds per 1,000: 38.8. **Doctors per 1,000:** 0.16.
Radio receivers per 1,000 (est.): 36.
Cinema seats per 1,000: 0.05.
Telephones per 1,000: 41.4. **Motor cars per 1,000:** 0.02.

Unlike the other states of Southeast Asia, Thailand never came under colonial rule, although it did concede some territory occupied by non Thais in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In October 1973 the military regime of field marshals Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapas Charusathiara collapsed following massive student demonstrations in Bangkok. The two leaders and Thanom's son, Colonel Narong Kittikachorn, fled into exile. King Bhumibol appointed the Rector of Thammasat University and President of the Supreme Court, Sanya Dharmasakti, as new Prime Minister in an interim government. The new Constitution, the 10th in Thailand's history, was signed by the King in October, 1974.

Before this stunning upheaval, Thailand had been governed by a succession of military dictators who became deeply involved with the United States in the Indochina War. Pibul Songkhram, who took part in the 1932 coup which ended the Thai monarchy's absolute power and whose admiration for fascist Germany and Italy led Thailand into alliance with Japan in World War II, dominated Bangkok politics from 1938 until 1957 (except for a period of rather chaotic civilian rule from 1945–48).

In 1976 Pibul was driven into exile following a coup d'etat by the commander of the army, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. The following year, Sarit appointed Colonel Thanom Kittikachorn as his prime minister. Sarit died in 1963, and was succeeded by Thanom. In 1971 he annulled the three year old constitution, dissolved the National Assembly, and declared martial law under a military junta called the National Executive Council. In December 1972, a new interim constitution was promulgated giving Thanom dictatorial powers, and a new Assembly was appointed with police and military representatives holding 200 of the 299 seats. The interim constitution remained in force during the first year of civilian rule following the regime's downfall, but the Assembly was replaced by a body of individuals appointed by the King.

In July 1975, Thailand, under Premier Kukrit Pramoj, became the third ASEAN country to establish diplomatic relations with China.

THAILAND

Introduction

Traditional village-level community values and institutions that have propped up Thai society for centuries are fast disintegrating under the impact of western urban influences. It is within this general framework that a team of volunteer researchers and potential rural change agents surveyed villages in Thailand, examining various socio-economic factors that either promote or slow down the village people's struggle for self-reliance and self-determination.

It was not the main aim of the research to undertake an academically oriented empirical research. There is no shortage of scholarly studies undertaken by competent sociologists and economists. It had a simple objective: to enable potential field workers and change agents to have a first hand account of village life and to acquire a grassroots point of view of the socio-economic rural situation in Thailand.

Selection of the eight villages covered by the survey was not based on accepted research techniques like random sampling which would have meant the time-consuming process of sampling, complex questionnaire, tabulation and processing of data. Apart from the prescription that the four major geographical regions (i.e., northern, northeastern, southern, and central) be represented, the villages were selected on the basis of physical accessibility and presence of local contacts. One village in the northern region, Sob-Kai, was specially selected because it is the proposed site for a rural youth program whose rationale is expected to be provided by this same study.

The research required participant observation in which the survey team lived and dialogued with villagers for a period of time. Field researchers made use of guide questions but interviews with villagers on the whole tended to be free-wheeling. Data gathered in the field were supplemented by available documents on local government and non-government community development programs.

The report produced by the survey team is mainly descriptive and offers somewhat unsystematized impressions, notes and sketches of village people's cultural traits, economic problems and potentials. This paper summarizes some of its findings in more coherent fashion.

The content is here presented in four parts: community solidarity, the role of religion in village life, the economic problems faced by villagers, and the role of youth and students. Following the original report, effort will also be made to discuss each of these subjects by

noting the differences between villagers in the four geographical regions covered by the study.

Community Solidarity

The study is premised on the thesis that the people's struggle for social change and self-reliance is a collective social movement. Hence effort must be made to examine cultural and social factors that make for or do not make for community solidarity. The report notes the differences between the regions in this respect. The northern and central regions are endowed with fertile land and good climate. Not subject to abject poverty and oppression, the villagers tend to be contented, passive and individualistic. There is very little organized effort to participate in social change and youth groups like the *Young Lad and Lass* are involved in nothing more than traditional youth concerns like athletics and village entertainment.

Conditions — geographical, economic, and cultural — are starkly different in the northeastern and southern regions. The northeastern region is often plagued by chronic economic, social and political problems; not to mention the harshness of nature which reaps nothing but destructive floods or famine. Villagers here appear to be less prone to individualism and passivity. Particularly notable in the southern region is the presence of strong communal ties derived largely from Islamic traditions. Harsh personality traits appear also to characterize the people.

In all these regions however urban civilization and capitalist influences are creeping, threatening whatever communal bonds there are (as in the northeastern and southern regions) and further promoting individualistic tendencies in the northern and central regions.

The Role of Religion

The influence of religion in the villagers' daily life is too obvious to be ignored. Thailand is predominantly Buddhist and the Islamic people are a significant minority. Christians are a negligible group but have access to privileges mainly because of their western education. Buddhism exercises a strong cultural influence on most Thai villagers. Historically it has had the positive contribution of serving as a basis of communal ties and of providing moral or ethical constraint for individual abuses and exploitative practices. On the other hand, however, it has drawn attention from the material problems of the villagers and has continued to resist scientific growth by fostering superstitions among the rural folks. Moreover, most Buddhist monks have provided support for oppressive political and economic structures in the villages since not a few of them are themselves politically powerful village leaders.

Islamic religion is strong in the southern region and while providing strong communal bonds in the villages, has not really used its strong potential for social and economic change. What it has promoted is a strong anti-Buddhist, anti-christian feeling that has on several occasions disrupted village life in southern Thailand.

Christians are relatively more interested in the socio-economic uplift of the rural poor and one can cite a long list of programs organized by christian groups ranging from Leprosy Relief and rural development programs in Chiengmai to *Live with People* seminars conducted by the local Student Christian Movement (SCM). Programs however are still basically relief and service oriented, with the SCM program often degenerating into a week-end excursion.

Economic Problems of Villagers

Most of Thailand, with the exception of northeastern region, is endowed with abundant cultivable land and gentle climate that has made it a ranking rice-producing country in Asia. In the north there is relatively less land for cultivation but villagers always have access to food available in the fringes of the jungles and hills. The southern region enjoys a vast reserve of natural resources and; in the central area, fish and rice are in good supply. All these should have meant good life for the Thai villagers but as we shall recount briefly, the contrary is true.

Semi-feudal conditions, characterized by concentration of landownership in a few, domination of the market by middlemen and local compradors, and low level of agricultural technology have kept the average Thai villager a poor and oppressed man. This condition goes hand in hand with limited industrial development confined (specially in the villages) to simple cottage industries and handicrafts (e.g., those producing silk clothing, umbrellas, silver wares and potteries). It is significant to note that cultural factors have served to support this state of affairs by inculcating passivity, docility, and superstition among the villagers.

A quick review is also made of the small ring of influential villagers in the rural areas. In the northern region, for instance, the *Kamnan* (district chief or headman), the *Puyaibaan* (village headman), teacher, public health officer and other government personnel exert tremendous influence on village decision-making. The general docility and characteristic gentility of the villagers in this region have made them easy prey to the influential few's voracity, noted specially in the concentration of economic power in the same politically influential few. The southern region, on the other hand, seems prone to iron hand rule by a few people in position of political authority. Some of these leaders are also reported to be in cahoots with terrorists and gangsters who make life even more difficult for the southern Thais.

Role of Youth and Students in the Rural Struggle

Much international attention has been focussed on the youth and student movement in Thailand since the much vaunted October revolution in 1973 which toppled the military regime in Thailand. Indeed student organisations have played an increasingly significant role in national politics. Three types of youth groups are outlined in the survey report:

1) government-supported,

2) church-related, and

3) secular student mass organizations.

Youth groups and projects have been either organized or supported by the goverment primarily to counter communist influence. Their activities and rural youth programs are concentrated in areas officially marked as susceptible to communist subversion. They therefore tend to be short-term in nature, fizzling out as soon as the immediate objective of stemming communist influence is achieved. Church-related youth programs largely complement those of the government since they are by and large also anti-communist. They normally concentrate on remote areas and hill tribes where government influence is not strongly felt. Most of them are also interested less in promoting the welfare of the rural poor than in recruiting adherents of the faith among the tribesmen.

Student involvement in the plight of the rural poor is mainly in the form of mobilizing public opinion and pressuring the government through public protests and mass demonstrations. It was only recently that students started really spending some time with the rural poor through the "learning from and teaching the people" student drive. While there is increasing interest in this type of student activity, long-term communication with villagers and effective follow-up of work remain a serious problem.

Much also needs to be done in terms of promoting genuine rural youth organizations that serve the cause of the peasantry, as these are in fact non-existent at the moment.

Conclusion

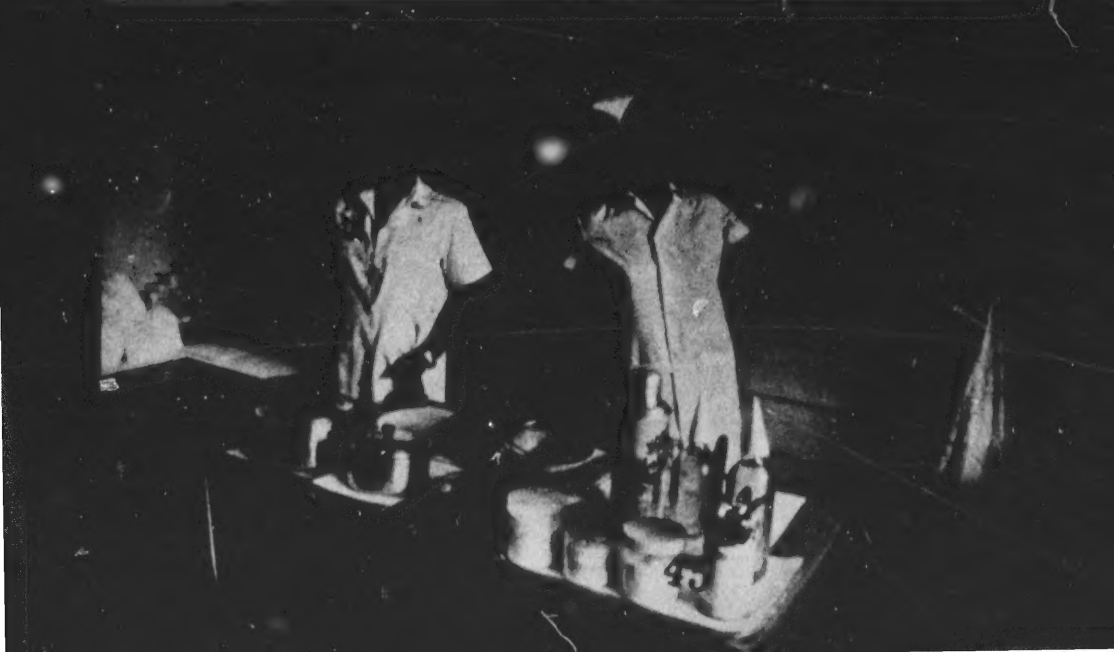
At present, wave after wave of urban culture have filtered from the central region into the less accessible areas and communities. Village level communal bonds based on traditional institutions and religious values are increasingly eroded under the impact of modernization and urbanization. More and more people are becoming isolated and individualistic. But there is no turning back. **What is urgently called for is an alternative cohesive force that will mobilize and unify the villagers to bring themselves closer to the twin goal of**

national self-reliance and self-determination. Only then can they overcome both their isolation and their poverty.

The study underlies the need for rural youth programs that will instil the positive values of self-reliance and collective decision-making. The village cooperative being planned in Sob-Kai by young people hopes to be a contribution to this effort. □

— Summary report of a survey by
Chanet **Kumtong** and Supot **Thepwan**

Land area: 514,000 sq. km. (cultivated 200,000 sq. km.; forest 290,000 sq. km).
Provinces: 71
Population (74 est.): 41m. Major cities: Bangkok (est.), 4m; Chiang Mai, 900,000; Korat, 86,000; Udorn, 58,000; Haadyai, 57,000.
Birth rate per 1,000 (71): 34.5.
Death rate per 1,000 (71): 6.4.
School places (71): Primary, 5m; Secondary, 1.6m; Tertiary, 450,000.
Hospital beds per 1,000: 1.07. **Doctors per 1,000:** 0.14.
TV sets (69): 241,000. **Radio Receivers** (69): 2.55m.
Cinema seats (70): 211,000.



Youth in the National Struggle

An Introduction to National Presentations
by
Manuel Mondejar

Role of Youth

What then is the role of youth?

In the people's struggle for liberation, there is no such distinction as to the roles of youth or adult, man or woman. This distinction comes up only in bourgeois discussions that are reminiscent of idealist philosophy.

But be it as it may, let us ask ourselves the question. To ask the question we will have to relate ourselves to reality and the objective conditions that are the determining factors in history.

The *Mukhti Bahini* of Bangladesh who were the vanguards of their revolutionary struggle were mainly young men and women. The *Viet Congs* of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam that toppled down the mighty force of America were young men and women. The so-called communist coup in Indonesia was neutralized mainly by a highly politicized and mobile youthful cadres of the anti-communist variety. The April Insurgency of Sri Lanka that led to dramatic changes in the socio-political framework of that country were led by the young men and women of Sri Lanka. The most effective opposition to the Martial Law government in the Philippines has for its vanguards young cadres. The same in South Korea. The role of the young Thai students in the October Revolution is well known. The same is true now in Malaysia, in India, in Pakistan. **Asia is young. Its population is young. The burden of the struggle for liberation against oppression and exploitation is mainly carried by the young people.**

The rural areas where the vast majority of the population live is teeming with young people. Thus, no doubt, any attempt toward restructuring the unjust social order will be participated in principally by the young people, either as leaders or as the rank and file members.

Since we are mostly Church-oriented groups, steeped in tradition and in the respect of old age for its wisdom and wealth of experience, it becomes a necessity to focus our attention on the value as well as the necessity of youth participation, direct and indirect, in the affairs of the Church as people. We cannot demand this, that would be futile and

unnecessary. We have to seize the opportunity and assume leadership whenever and wherever it is necessary, tactically and strategically.

Now, where and when would this be tactically and strategically necessary? If we accept the premises laid out in this paper – certain paths are clear.

Training

Specifically, in the field of training. It is an admitted fact that the formation of cadres are better accomplished with young people who are full of enthusiasm and ready to risk their young lives for the sake of certain goals and objectives. Whether we like it or not, whether we decide on this or not, the fact is and will be – young people will be taking up the challenge of the liberation movements in Asia. This has been happening and will continue to happen. **If we want to be in the mainstream of the people's struggles all over Asia, we have to prepare ourselves with skills, both intellectually and physically. Theory and practice mould the young cadres into dynamic militant vanguards of the revolutionary struggle. I say vanguards, because as such with youthful enthusiasm and vigor, young people forge ahead, sometimes recklessly, which can only be guided properly by discipline – the discipline of ideology and organization.**

Only under the strict auspices of a democratic organization can checks and balances be achieved. Otherwise the natural tendency would be spontaneity that is erratic and often times adventurous, or the other side of the coin – the tendency to dogmatism and the easy way out, which can always be rhetorically defended.

Does this then dampen initiative and creativity – basic qualities of young people? No. In each country, in each situation at present, a careful study of the motive forces of the liberation struggles will reveal either the existence of such an organization which is at the forefront of the struggle, or a mixture or variety of groups and organizations which claim to be at the forefront; or their non-existence. In both cases young people can take up the initiative and the creativity either in renewing and invigorating such movements or in creating one where it does not exist. But this conclusion can only be derived after careful study, after in-depth investigation of the objective conditions of one's country and situation, and a careful examination of one's commitment and limitations.

However, in whatever form our participation will be (as long as it will contribute to the progressive movement of the people's struggle, again a careful analysis and evaluation must be undertaken from time to time) should give us sufficient confidence that we are on the right track.

Otherwise, we become counter-productive, counter-revolutionaries, ultimately – reactionaries.

We must be aware that the tools for the analysis of the socio-political conditions are not ideologically neutral. The very methodology used determines their ideological role. But what determines the methodology to be used? The best possible option for the human and political dimension of the problem confronting us.

Motivating Church Youth

Often in the course of discussions especially with members of Church-related or influenced groups, two questions are always asked. How do you motivate and inspire young people to actively participate in the task of liberation of the Church, and to remain committed and to sustain their enthusiasm in this work? Secondly, can the Church really inspire the people to struggle for their liberation? Can it take up this leadership?

It would be presumptuous for me to answer these questions satisfactorily in this paper. Suffice it to say, however, that to these questions, I retort other questions.

Are the young people involved in Church activities and in Church groups the people you should address the challenge? Are they the motive powers in the people's struggle for liberation? Does the Church have within her ownself the capacity to give this inspiration, and to sustain it with a mechanism that is so structured to facilitate this task?

Too often we poise the challenge to the wrong people. Constricted by our own ghettos we are prone to believe that we only have the "worlds of salvation". We have tended to view salvation in terms of its quantitative dimension – "the number of persons saved, the possibility of being saved, the role which the Church plays in this process" – that we forget the intimate relationship between salvation and the process of man's liberation throughout history. Taken from this standpoint, we would then be more concerned with the value of human existence, the intensity of the presence of God's grace among men, and the tremendous religious significance of man's action in history. Only if we take it from this point of view are we able to break the barriers that constrict us to our own little worlds, product of a minority complex of which the Christian Churches have been hemmed in in Asia.

Again, only when we have realized that Church is people, and when we mean people – the majority of the masses who are poor and im-

poverished in the villages of Asia – do we come to grips with the apparent meaninglessness of the questions.

"Salvation must be understood as 'the inner force and fullness of this movement of man's self-generation which was initiated by the work of creation'. Salvation is conceived as a 'process which embraces the whole of man and human history'. This means that building the temporal city is not simply a stage of humanization or pre-evangalization, nor the fruit of the ethical application of Christ's saving work. Building a just, peaceful, and fraternal human society *is* what salvation is all about." □

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